

Andrew M Patterson – Engineering COSTEP
Indian Health Service
Office of Environmental Health and Engineering
Division of Facilities Operations

I will shortly be completing my second tour of duty as an engineering COSTEP. My assignment was with the Indian Health Service in the Division of Facilities Operations at the IHS headquarters in Rockville, MD. As an engineer, my mission was to support the maintenance, construction, and management of health facilities for the American Indian and Alaska natives.

At headquarters, I spent my time working on several data management systems. My first responsibility was documenting the large Health Facilities Data System, which contains the information on all the facilities managed by our division. By large, I mean between two and three thousand separate facilities. Part of the need for the documentation was the second project I handled. Congress mandated a data system that will keep track of all federally owned and operated facilities (known as the Federal Real Property Profile). To meet the requirements, I worked on the submission program that will extract the necessary data from our database and submit it to the new government system. I also developed a web-based application program for the Tribal General Equipment Funds Request System which is a five million dollar program for promoting tribal management of health facilities.

So I spent most of my working hours in front of a computer screen. However, all work and no play was neither my idea nor my supervisor's idea of a good summer. It might seem strange that the IHS headquarters is located so far away from the population which they serve. Never having been out to the west, I hoped that with this COSTEP I would have the opportunity to travel and meet the people whose mission I supported. That is exactly what I did.

In early July I was taken out to the Albuquerque and Navajo Areas with an extern with whom I had worked for a whirlwind tour of several facilities and area offices. After all that time staring at numbers and descriptions on a computer screen, actually standing inside a facility and seeing the people it supports was truly a fantastic experience. We saw a large renovation project and new quarters construction at the Zuni health center. We saw the old Fort Defiance hospital and its replacement. At Piñon, we saw a new hospital that was only just having the equipment put in place. I could just wax enthusiastic about each stop, but we just kept on moving and saw the new Red Mesa foundation, then to Dulce, Taos, and Santa Fe. Along the way we stopped in at the Navajo and Albuquerque offices. It is amazing that all the work we were doing with numbers and data represents all those people and places. Great thanks to Kevin Stover for making it such a fantastic trip, both in the facilities and in the car.

It is a great feeling to look back at the summer and feel that the work you did actually means something. My COSTEP here with the IHS has definitely been an incredibly fun and rewarding experience. The work was interesting and varied, and the people and places just made the whole experience a good one.